

Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-07 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-01 L-02

CIAE-00 INR-11 NSAE-00 RSC-01 DODE-00 SAM-01 PRS-01

DRC-01 /056 W

----- 061434

R 200554Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5226

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

S E C R E T BANGKOK 11788

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, TH, LA

SUBJECT: RELATIONSHIP OF NVN FORCES IN CAMBODIA AND LAOS AND
U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND

REF: A. STATE 155362

B. BANGKOK 11396

C. STATE 136601

D. BANGKOK 5133

E. BANGKOK 3914

F. BANGKOK 2784

G. BANGKOK 9673

H. BANGKOK 2457

I. BANGKOK 9056

J. BANGKOK 11665

1. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN OR
OTHER THAI GOVERNMENT LEADERS INTEND TO HAVE THE FUTURE
DISPOSITION OF U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND DEPENDENT SOLELY ON
SPECIFIC NORTH VIETNAMESE ACTIONS IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA.
OVER THE PAST YEAR THERE HAS BEEN A VIRTUAL FLOOD OF PUBLIC
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STATEMENTS AS WELL AS PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS ON THE BASIC

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND. OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE AND INSTRUCTIONS HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT U.S. FORCE LEVELS AND WITHDRAWAL RATES WILL BE KEYED TO THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA OR SOUTHEAST ASIA AS A WHOLE (REFS C AND D). FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN AND DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI HAVE TOLD THE THAI PRESS CORPS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES WILL BE CARRIED OUT GRADUALLY DEPENDING ON THE GENERAL SITUATION IN INDOCHINA (REFS E, F AND G). THEY HAVE REJECTED AT EVERY TURN THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY UNILATERAL U.S. WITHDRAWAL, AT TIMES APPEARING TO LINK THIS SPECIFICALLY TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF NVN FORCES FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA (REFS H AND I). IN THIS REGARD, CHATCHAI TOLD THE "NEW YORK TIMES" THAT HIS RESPONSE TO THE NVN DEMAND THAT U.S. FORCES BE REMOVED FROM THAILAND WAS TO SAY: "ALL RIGHT, LET'S DO THE SAME THING. YOU WITHDRAW YOUR TROOPS FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA AND WE WILL ASK THE AMERICANS TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM THAILAND," (REF I).

2. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, CONCLUDE THAT ANY PARTICULAR STATEMENT ON AN ISOLATED OCCASION REPRESENTS THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE THAI POSITION ON THE BASIC CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND. THE THAI DO INTEND TO DETERMINE THEMSELVES WHEN OR IF THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE SHOULD END. THEY HAVE EMPHASIZED THIS RIGHT REPEATEDLY, AND HAVE QUOTED CHATCHAI'S REPORT OF HEARING FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER IN OCTOBER 1973 THAT THE UNITED STATES RECOGNIZES THAT IT IS UP TO THAILAND TO DECIDE WHETHER AMERICAN FORCES SHOULD REMAIN OR BE WITHDRAWN: "WHATEVER YOU WANT, WE ARE WILLING TO DO." (REFS G, H AND I) ARTICULATE AND INFLUENTIAL THAI WILL HOLD THEIR LEADERS AND US TO ACCOUNT ON THIS POINT AND IT WOULD BE FOLLY FOR US TO BELIEVE OR ACT OTHERWISE.

3. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE AS THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT THEMSELVES AND IT IS APPROPRIATE, TO SEEK GREATER CLARIFICATION AND DELINEATION OF THE EXTERNAL CONDITIONS THE THAI FEEL MUST EXIST BEFORE THEY WILL ASK US TO WITHDRAW ALL OUR FORCES. EVEN AMBASSADOR ANAN, WHO HAS NOT BEEN HELPFUL ON OTHER MATTERS DURING HIS RECENT CONSULTATIONS IN BANGKOK, FIELDDED THIS QUESTION RELATIVELY SKILLFULLY IN HIS RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE (REF J).

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4. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: THE INDO-CHINA-WIDE RATIONALE FOR THE RETENTION OF AMERICAN FORCES IN THAILAND HAS BEEN DISCUSSED BY ME REPEATEDLY AND AT LENGTH WITH TOP LEADERS OF THE RTG, INCLUDING THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND HIS DEPUTY. THEIR EXCELLENT UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF OUR POSITION HAS BEEN WELL DOCUMENTED IN THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS, SOME OF WHICH HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE

EMBASSY CABLES REFERRED TO ABOVE. THEY ARE QUITE CLEARLY
WORRIED ABOUT POTENTIAL PATHET LAO ASCENDANCY IN LAOS AND
THE THREAT POSED BY NVA CONTROL OF APPROXIMATELY 100 MILES
OF THE LAOTIAN SIDE OF THE MEKONG-THAI-LAOTIAN BORDER. IN
THIS CONTEXT I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THEIR RAISING WITH ME THEIR
INTEREST IN GETTING THE NVA OUT OF LAOS TO REMIND THEM THAT
THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR WITHDRAWAL OF THESE FORCES NOW RESTS
WITH HANOI. I REGRET IF MY REPORTING OF THIS BRIEF
CONVERSATION AND CHARUNPHAN'S AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO TAKE
AN INITIATIVE IN GENERATING PRESSURE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL
OF NVA FORCES FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA CAUSED DISTRESS AMONG
WASHINGTON READERS OF REF B. I WISH TO ASSURE ADDRESSEES
THAT THERE IS NO CONFUSION IN MY MIND REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE
WE ATTACH TO RETENTION OF U.S. AIR POWER IN THAILAND. I
CONSIDER IT ESSENTIAL HOWEVER, TO TAKE FULL TACTICAL ADVANTAGE
OF OPENINGS PROVIDED IN THE COURSE OF OFFICIAL CONTACTS,
AND IN THIS CASE I PROVIDED PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKING FOR OUR
THAI FRIENDS ON MATTERS THAT THREATEN THEM MOST DIRECTLY
SO AS TO ENHCNCE THEIR SUPPORT FOR OUR MILITARY PRESENCE
HERE WHICH UNDERGIRDS OUR POLICY OBJECTIVES FOR ALL OF INDO-CHINA.
KINTNER

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, PRESS COMMENTS, MILITARY PERSONNEL, MILITARY BASES, FORCE & TROOP LEVELS, MILITARY PLANS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 JUL 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BANGKO11788
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740196-0137
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740732/aaaabbbn.tel
Line Count: 136
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: A. STATE 155362
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 JUL 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <31 MAR 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RELATIONSHIP OF NVN FORCES IN CAMBODIA AND LAOS AND U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, MOPS, TH, LA, US, CB
To: STATE VIENTIANE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005